

WIS, Columbia SCLocal Broadcasting in Service to the Community

Localism in television broadcasting is a cornerstone of the operation of WIS Television. With a veteran on-air staff and decades of service to the community, WIS has a strong base of support and goodwill in the Columbia area. For more than 50 years, the station has made its mark in the community with news, community-oriented programming and service projects that truly make a difference in the Midlands of South Carolina.

Local News

WIS airs 35 local newscasts every week, totaling 28.4 hours of programming. That's more than one out of every six hours of the broadcast schedule devoted to local news. In addition, the station operates a website, wistv.com, which is visited by more than 200,000 unique users in an average month. Each day we post to the website several dozen news stories, several stories in streaming video, as well as weather forecasts, current weather conditions, and extensive listings of community events.

Public Affairs

In the public affairs area, WIS produces two weekly half-hour programs that examine local and statewide issues in depth. The programs feature public officials and community and business leaders discussing issues of importance to our viewers. In addition, a daily public affairs feature on our midday newscast offers civic and community groups an opportunity to publicize issues of concern and local events of local significance. Some recent examples include a community cleanup, a local band festival, and a charity fundraiser.

WIS also airs program-length specials on subjects of public interest or in support of community causes. In the past year, we have preempted network or syndicated programming to air: a local "family forum" with Democratic candidates for President, two debates involving candidates for U.S. Senate, telethons in support of the Children's Miracle Network and the United Negro College Fund, as well as several football and basketball games involving hometown teams from the University of South Carolina.

Emergency Programming

When breaking news or severe weather disrupt the lives of people in our area, WIS breaks into regular programming for extended coverage. For example, when this year's rash of hurricanes and tropical storms set off tornadoes and flooding in South Carolina, WIS was quick to respond. On the September day when the remnants of Hurricane Frances swept across our state, we expanded our newscasts throughout the day to provide weather alerts and news reports on the damage and recovery efforts. We also teamed with the local American Red Cross chapter for a phone bank in our 5, 6, and 7 PM News that raised \$21,000 and recruited 100 new volunteers for disaster relief efforts.

WIS has a significant investment in the technology needed to provide continuous coverage of local emergencies. The station operates a satellite truck, four mobile microwave trucks, and a microwave-equipped helicopter. Our investment in weather technology includes live Doppler radar and several state-of-the-art graphics imaging systems. We also participate in South Carolina's Amber alert system, interrupting regular programming every 15 minutes after the State Law Enforcement Division issues an alert for a missing child. And when severe weather hits our area, WIS operates phone banks night and day to collect

information about emergency service, school closings and cancellations of community events.

Political Programming

Year in and year out, WIS looks for opportunities to provide issue-oriented coverage to viewers in a variety of formats. During the current political season, for example, WIS is providing one hour per week of free air time to candidates during the last month of their campaigns. We carve out ten minute segments, ending our 5 a.m. and 5 p.m. newscasts early to broadcast in-depth interviews with all legally qualified candidates for federal office and for selected state offices. Our extensive news coverage plan for the 2004 general elections includes candidate profiles, voter information segments, and mini-debates on ballot referendums. The on-air coverage plan is supplemented by on-line coverage. The SC Votes'04 section of wistv.com features comprehensive news coverage, streaming video of all our in-depth candidate interviews, and links to the candidates' websites.

Local Programming

The spirit of community involvement at WIS extends to its non-news programming. For 36 years WIS has produced Awareness, a weekly program of minority-oriented public affairs. It's believed to be the longest-running program of its kind in local television. The station also produces Newswatch, a weekly discussion of issues focusing on business and politics. Anchor David Stanton uses his decades of experience in South Carolina government, law, and economics to question the state's top newsmakers.

WIS viewers also enjoy the station's annual production of the Carolina Carillon holiday parade and the locally produced segments of the United Negro College Fund and Children's Miracle network telethons. And last fall WIS produced a 50th anniversary special, featuring clips of several favorite shows and a history of the station.

Public Service

The news department at WIS also distinguishes itself in its service to our Midlands community. Here's a list of just three of the station's many service projects, for which our news staff acted as organizers, on-air spokespeople, and public-spirited citizens:

-- Job Market Monday: Evening news anchor Judi Gatson entered year three of an effort to help Midlands residents find jobs during times of economic hardship for many. Working with the state Employment Security Commission and using in-studio phone banks, Judi has helped hundreds of people find jobs and has provided job-hunting assistance to countless others.

-- A Class Act: Reporter Heather Brown devoted weeks of her time to coordinating and producing reports on this new program, which helped scores of teachers in the Midlands obtain the supplies they needed for their classrooms. As state funding for public schools declined, teachers found themselves digging deeper into their own pockets to pay for classroom essentials. An online forum on the station's website was the connection between teachers who posted their needs and generous donors who reached out to help.

-- Families Helping Families: WIS has used the power of television to make a major impact in the community each year since 1992. The station's annual

holiday appeal helps more than 1200 families put presents under the Christmas tree each December. Using on-air phone banks, the station asks viewers to buy gifts for individuals and families. And the response is nothing short of amazing.

WIS employees do more than serve the community in their on-air roles. Our on-air talent make hundreds of public appearances each year. WIS staff members from all departments also serve on numerous boards for civic and charitable groups in the Midlands, including the Red Cross, United Way, and the Girl Scouts.

This fall, WIS launched an ambitious public service effort - a reading buddies program with a local elementary school. As part of the S.C. Chamber of Commerce High Performance Partnership (HPP) program, 20 station staff members - including several top managers - visit Gadsden Elementary twice a month to encourage reading and give their "buddies" the attention of a caring adult who can serve as a role model. Most students at the school are low on the socio-economic scale, and HPP has a track record of improving student achievement, attendance, and behavior.

Summary

WIS is a local television station. But more than that, it is a major community institution and resource. The station has been the market leader for more than 50 years, but is not satisfied to merely continue its historic commitments. During the past year, WIS has stepped up community-based news coverage and added new public service projects. We even threw a 50th anniversary block party for our viewers last November, which some 5,000 people attended. As we enter a second half-century of service, WIS is determined to expand its commitment to localism in television broadcasting.

Melbourne A. Stebbins
Sr. Vice President and General Manager
WIS Television
Columbia, SC